

News Release



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Coleman National Fish Hatchery Begins Process of Transporting Up to 12 Million Juvenile Salmon With First Releases This Week into Acclimation Pens Near Rio Vista, California

Sacramento - The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced today that the Coleman National Fish Hatchery has begun a process that could result in approximately 12 million Chinook salmon smolts being trucked and released, carrying out details of a special drought contingency plan announced earlier this month. The Chinook smolts, 3 inches in length, have been raised at the Coleman hatchery in Anderson, Calif., as part of the federal hatchery's role in partially mitigating for Shasta and Keswick dams on the upper Sacramento River.

Coleman NFH will transport the Chinook salmon smolts from the hatchery over approximately 180 miles to a site on the lower Sacramento River near Rio Vista, Calif., the first time that site has been used. This is the first time USFWS has trucked smolts from Coleman since 2011. While it's a 180-mile trip for the trucks, the salmon will have their typical migration from the hatchery to the ocean shortened by 260 to 300 river miles. The smolts will be placed in net pens operated by the Fishery Foundation of California for acclimatization and then released.

Coleman NFH smolts are typically released on-site into Battle Creek, a tributary of the Sacramento River, so that they complete the imprinting cycle during their outmigration to the ocean. A continuing severe drought in the Central Valley of California, however, has produced conditions in the Sacramento River and Delta detrimental to the survival of juvenile salmon. To avoid unacceptably high levels of juvenile fish mortality that may result in 2014, this one-time release strategy should produce substantial increases in ocean harvest opportunity.

The operation will be one of coordination and collaboration between the USFWS, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, National Marine Fisheries Service, and the Fishery Foundation of California. If triggers are met in the coming months and all 12 million salmon are trucked from Coleman, the effort will take 22 non-consecutive days, using between four and seven USFWS and CDFW trucks each day. Each truck holds up to 2,800 gallons of water and each can carry up to 130,000 smolts at water temperatures between 55-60 degrees.

In addition to Coleman NFH, an estimated 18.4 million salmon smolts are scheduled to be transported until early June to San Pablo Bay from four state hatcheries operated by the CDFW: Feather River Hatchery in Oroville, Mokelumne River Fish Hatchery in Clements, Nimbus Hatchery in Gold River, and Merced River Fish Hatchery in Snelling. If USFWS continues trucking into April and May, the San Pablo Bay site will also be used for Coleman NFH releases.

This release strategy increases the levels of straying. Salmon tend to return to the point of release when planted from the hatchery to a river, and this release strategy is likely to compromise some of the hatchery objectives, including contributions to harvest in the upper Sacramento River and the ability to collect adequate broodstock at the Coleman NFH in future years – particularly 2016. This one-time strategy, however, represents the best possible option when faced

with the possibility of losing the entire 2013 production year. In future years, under less extreme conditions, the standard protocol for releasing Chinook from the Coleman NFH will continue to be on-site releases into Battle Creek.

Coleman National Fish Hatchery was constructed in 1942 as part of the mitigation measures to help preserve significant runs of Chinook salmon threatened by the loss of natural spawning areas resulting from the construction of Shasta and Keswick dams on the upper Sacramento River. One of the primary goals of the hatchery is to assure salmon will return to the upper Sacramento River as adults to contribute to the upper Sacramento in-river fishery, and return to the hatchery in sufficient numbers to perpetuate the runs. Another important goal of the hatchery is to contribute to the ocean sport and commercial fishery. Coleman NFH contributes up to 100,000 Chinook annually to the ocean fisheries as well as thousands of fish for the fisheries in the Sacramento River.

Links to key documents:

- Media Advisory regarding March 25 media events:
http://www.fws.gov/sfbaydelta/documents/media_advisory_contingency_strategy_release_3-21-2014.pdf
- Map of State/Federal Hatcheries and release sites:
http://www.fws.gov/sfbaydelta/maps/chinook_salmon_relocation_20140321_Final.pdf
- The USFWS Contingency Plan released March 10:
http://www.fws.gov/sfbaydelta/documents/contingency_release_strategies_for_coleman_national_fish_hatchery_3_7_14_draft.pdf
- The CDFW Contingency Plan released March 10:
<http://www.fws.gov/sfbaydelta/documents/CDFW-Spring-Run-Drought-Contingency-Plan.pdf>

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